

NEWS



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Report: Two Decades of Progress for NJ Kids *Despite rising poverty, child well-being improves in many areas*

Over two decades, the health and well-being of New Jersey children has improved in many key areas, from more children attending preschool, fewer 4th graders failing reading tests and more teens graduating on time from high school, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 25th edition of its annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

Since 1990, New Jersey also saw substantial declines in the percent of uninsured children, child and teen deaths, births to teenagers and children living in families where the head of the household lacks a high school diploma.

"This is great news, as we celebrate more than two decades of publishing state Kids Count reports," said Cecilia Zalkind, executive director, Advocates for Children of New Jersey. "It proves that measuring the well-being of our children can lead to positive change, ensuring that more children grow up safe, healthy and educated."

She noted, however, that the continued rise in child poverty can threaten these gains and requires a coordinated, sustained response. In 1990, 11 percent of New Jersey's children lived in families earning too little to meet their needs, compared to 15 percent in 2012.

Despite rising poverty, New Jersey mirrored several positive trends across the county.

"The nation has gained significant knowledge since 1990 on how to give children a good start and help them meet major milestones throughout childhood," said Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "The federal government and states have implemented a number of policies since then to improve

New Jersey Rankings

Overall: 8

Economic Well-being: 16

Education: 2

Family and Community: 10

Health: 18

Giving Every Child A Chance

several areas of child well-being. As we embark on the next 25 years, I urge all sectors to work collaboratively to develop and advance solutions that help all children succeed.”

In addition to the 25-year look back, this year’s *Data Book* also tracks more recent trends that compare data from 2005 to 2012 and rank states using 16 indicators across four broad areas – Economic Well-Being, Education, Health and Family and Community.

The recent trends show how children were faring mid-decade prior to the economic crisis, compared to how they are doing in the aftermath.

New Jersey dropped to 8th place in the national Kids Count overall rankings, down from 5th last year. The state remained 2nd in the nation for its students’ high performance on academic measures, surpassing national averages for more children attending preschool, more 4th and 8th grade students scoring at or above proficient in reading and math and more high school students graduating on time.

The state received its worst ranking – 19th – for health measures, which include the incidence of low-birth weight babies, uninsured children, child and teen deaths and teens who abuse alcohol or drugs. Two years ago, New Jersey was 5th in this area.

The state improved on the economic well-being of families, moving from 18th to 16th, but slipped slightly in the area of “Family and Community,” where it ranked 10th, compared to 9th last year. This area measures the percentage of children living in single-parent households, the education level of parents, the number of children living in high-poverty areas and the teen birth rate.

At 45th, New Jersey received its worse ranking for the high percentage of children living in households who spend more than the recommended 30 percent of income on housing. The best rankings were for student performance on 8th grade math tests and a low number of children ages 3 and 4 not attending preschool. New Jersey ranked 2nd nationally on both measures.

“The decline in the health ranking is concerning,” Zalkind said. “But it appears that this isn’t as much a function of New Jersey children doing much worse in this area, but other states doing better. The academic performance of our children is a result of the significant investment we make in preschool and K-12 education.”

“The Foundation’s partnership with state and national advocates for children has thrived since our first *Data Book* and has brought steady attention to how kids are faring,” added Laura Speer, Casey’s associate director for policy reform and advocacy. “The *Data Book* highlights the achievements of advocates across the country that have been critical in advancing increased investment in effective programs and services to help ensure that kids get the best possible start in life.”

The [KIDS COUNT Data Book](#) features the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. This information is available in the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#), which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of measures of child well-being. Data Center users can create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and view real-time information on mobile devices.

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Advocates for Children of New Jersey is a statewide, non-profit child research and action organization, committed to giving every child the chance to grow up safe, healthy and educated.